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The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM

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DEAR MEMBER,

A view of the political future of Europe closely resembling that discussed in last week's News-Letter has been recently put forward independently by two writers belonging to continental countries. The one is Zygmunt Litynski, a Polish contributor to the *World Review* for January. The gist of it is contained in the following passage :

"Europe can become the happiest continent in the world. But it will take time to untangle all the problems, to forget all the old wounds. A long period of time will be needed, which it will be the strict duty of Britain and the United States to guarantee. . . . There is only one way to guarantee peace, and that is by power."

The other contribution is a small book *Wanted—A Vision*[1] by Axel Heyst. He is described on the cover as a young foreign political writer without further specification of his nationality. It is a book of remarkable prescience in its anticipation of the course of events. The key idea finds expression in these sentences :

"The post war Europe must be not only organised but ruled. That task, which is one of the most responsible and difficult of any undertaken in history, should be tackled by the two Powers possessing the most universal character : Great Britain and the United States. This country has all the chances of enforcing a rule of justice over Europe. . . . England could offer this leadership to Europe, with the help of America, if only she would produce a programme which would be something new, wise and unselfish ; if she would describe her idea of a new European order, of a Europe where the energies of peoples and nations would be fully made use of and directed into the proper channels."

One of the many striking things in Mr. Heyst's volume is his clear perception that a constructive programme is entirely dependent on the education of youth. He writes :

"We must be ready to accept many lessons from our enemies. We need to recognise the fact that there will be no better Europe, no new order on the Continent, without the organisation of youth, without directing its energies into proper channels. The youth of Europe must be educated : the education of youth in new ideas is the fundamental factor in all attempts to rebuild Europe. Yes, we shall have to build our cloisters and training camps for the youth of Europe ; labour corps should be established and young people should toil for the reconstruction of the ruined Continent. New methods should be invented to train the class of young leaders, as the old method, based on class privileges, has failed. Work must be restored to its dignity, and the idolatry of gold must be ruled out from the human community."

Similar ideas are emerging with growing clearness in statements of the aims of the Allied Nations, as, for example, in President Roosevelt's message to Congress on January 6th. After re-affirming the objectives of freedom of speech and religion and freedom from want and fear, he continued :

"We shall not be satisfied to gain these objectives and then call it a day. I know I speak for the American people—and I have good reason to believe I speak also for all the other peoples who fight with us—when I say that this time we are determined not only to win the war but also to maintain the security of the peace which will follow."

[1] Minerva Publishing Co., 229-31, High Holborn, London, W.C.1. 6s.

The two fundamental points which are common to all these declarations are that there can be no rebuilding of Europe except on the basis of security guaranteed by force ; and, secondly, that the power structure which is essential will have no permanence except as the framework of a policy firmly directed to the true ends of human welfare. What needs to be grasped is that, if the foundations of the argument are sound, *both* things are essential. Neither has any chance of success apart from the other.

The great danger of the democracies is that these principles should meet with an easy general assent without realisation of their practical consequences. To carry out the first it will be necessary to maintain for a long period an Allied army in Europe as a police force, to control effectively all airfields and to accept the financial burden imposed by these measures. The second demands a large-hearted and clear-sighted social policy for Europe reaching far beyond anything that has yet taken shape in plans even for our own country. To commit ourselves to these policies and to fail to make them real in practice can lead only to chaos.

If these are the gigantic tasks on the fulfilment of which the future well-being of Europe, and as a consequence of mankind, depends, there are two major question which immediately concern us. The first is the preparation of ourselves for these vast responsibilities. We must frankly recognise that we lack at present the imagination, the disinterestedness, the steadfastness of purpose and the power of perseverance that are necessary to discharge them.

The second problem of crucial importance is that of a growing understanding between the Anglo-Saxon and Russian peoples. There is a widespread tendency at present to evade the realities of this question. It is idle to pretend that, if " liberty, tolerance and respect for the individual " are to be the foundations of the new order, these qualities are understood in the same sense in the U.S.S.R. and in the Anglo-Saxon world. That is one side of the picture which has to be squarely faced. The other side is that we must not assume that all wisdom and virtue are found among ourselves and that Russian experience has little or nothing to teach us. The mentality of the Slav peoples is a vast and, for most of us, an undiscovered world. Creative imagination beyond our present capacity and an immense amount of hard work are needed to bring about the understanding and co-operation with Russia, which is a vital necessity of the future.

In proportion as the double sense of stirring opportunity and of our own inadequacy is awakened in us, we shall be predisposed to respond to the invitation to prayer which is the subject of this week's Supplement. The writer, Father Geoffrey Curtis, is a member of the Community of the Resurrection, Mirfield, Yorks.

Yours sincerely,

J. H. Oldham

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THE CHRISTIAN
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Supplement to
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JANUARY 14TH 1942

THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

By The Rev. GEOFFREY CURTIS, C.R.

The Bishop of Oxford has affirmed his belief that if the one visible Church had been able to resist the forces of disintegration which from time to time have broken it into an ever-increasing number of fragments, we should by now have reached a stage of Christian civilisation at which war between the nations would have become unthinkable.[1] But in so far as failure to resist these divisive forces is the result of sin on the part of those who despite their disunion bear in common the name of Christ, then a large share of the guilt for the present unleashing of the forces of death must be laid at their door. The people of Christ by the effective assertion of their own supranational unity in Him, could have made world-war an impossibility. It might be urged that our share of the guilt is now the larger in that this is a second world-war. But while we cannot but acknowledge ourselves as once more found guilty for lack of zeal in obedience to our Lord's manifest will for our union, it is right to observe that there were those who took to heart the admonition conveyed to a dissident Christendom by the events of 1914 to 1918. In the score or so of years that followed between the two wars there was manifested a widespread and ever-increasing recovery of the sense of Christian community—a growing consciousness of the fact of Christian unity and of the need of Christian union ; a renaissance it may be observed which is the dialectical antithesis to that fissiparous tendency generated by the earlier renaissance of which nationalism was the primary fruit.

This renewal of Christlike supranationalism has found its principal expression in the missionary movement (World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910), in the "Life and Work" movement (Stockholm 1925 and Oxford 1937), in the "Faith and Order" movement (Lausanne 1927, and Edinburgh 1937), in the work for Christian unity of the World Student Christian Federation and in that great movement of prayer for the reunion of the Church, of which the widespread annual observance of this week of prayer for Christian unity (January 18th-25th) is a valuable and effective symbol.

Thus two at first sight mutually contradictory characteristics may be said to mark the age in which we are living. On the one hand the forces of discord, destruction and death have been released with unparalleled fury upon the world, to run riot to issues wholly incalculable. On the other hand, even in the very midst of the storm, we are well aware that among Christians of the warring as well as of the occupied nations, the forces making for unity and peace, inarticulate though they must needs for the most part be, have never been so strong or so widespread. The paradox which this contrast affords must stir new springs of hope in Christians confronting the world, as they do, with minds trained (through the reading of the Bible) in the Christian interpretation of world history as the field of the action of God. We have learnt from pondering that vast canvas the conviction that God's purposes for the world centre always in His own people—in Israel, His Church ; and we cannot but believe that the true clue to the significance of this age is to be found, not in all its havoc and turmoil and slaughter—in these brute facts envisaged apart—so much as in the movement of the Spirit by which this darkness is shot through and irradiated: the movement by which throughout the length and breadth of Christendom men are

[1] Foreword by the Bishop of Oxford to two pamphlets on the week of prayer by the Rev. G. Curtis, C.R., published by Pax House. The first of these "The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity" (3d.) has been freely used in this Supplement.

being led to long for, work for, pray for the restoration of unity among the scattered disciples of Christ.

DEFAULTING CHRISTENDOM

The spectacle before us of the " darkness that covers the earth " calls first of all for penitence from all Christians for their betrayal of their duty as witnesses to this unity envisaged, proclaimed, prayed for and established in principle, amongst His own, by our Lord. Fearful as they are, physical conflicts between nations and classes are but the symbolic reflection of an " infinite tragedy enacted in the depths " ; and chiefly in the depths of the divided soul of a defaulting Christendom. We have been indifferent to the sacrilege of the sundering of the Church. We have striven to hide rather than to heal her wounds, or at best to cure them at a level too near the surface. And now we have reaped our reward in our corporate helplessness to heal those of the world for which Christ died. The institutional churches *as such* have apparently for the most part not passed through the experience of self-condemnation on this and other grounds, which is the common bond of reviving Christian fellowship, and in the main are content to objectify outside themselves the evil of our time and project it into the national enemies.

DISUNITY AND THE WAY OF HEALING

Yet upon awakened Christians the world over two convictions have been more and more laying hold. The first is that among the manifold disorders of the world none is more disastrous than the disunion of the disciples of Christ—discord that is to say amongst those who are set to be its light, its salt, its leaven, the sacrament and earnest of its God-meant unity. The second is that inasmuch as the unity of the Church has a supernatural ground and source, the visible manifestation of that unity cannot be procured by any diplomatic accommodation that slurs over continuing differences of principle ; but that it can only come by action motivated at the deepest level of the Spirit : by a growing interior accord of separated Christians, in faith, penitence, reparation and prayer, with the prayer of our Lord Himself " that all may be one."

Christians of all communions, whatever their diversity of belief, can raise from their heart this appeal identical with that made to the Father on the eve of the Passion by the Christ Himself. In this prayer clearly expressive of His life intention to gather the human race into the community of His new creation, we have a meeting-ground where, under the banner of Charity, the prayers for unity of all true Christians can flow together. Here transcending all the limitations set by ignorance, prejudice, embittering memories, our intercessions converge in the Heart of Christ. Such prayer founded and centred in prayer initiated by the Son of God Himself, and hence in sure and essential unity with the continuous intercession of the Holy Spirit for the saints, will surely bring the gift which the Father desires to bestow upon His children. One cannot but share the belief expressed by the Superiors of the Anglican religious communities of men in their appeal for the observance of this week that " as the prayer of all Christians becomes unanimous with that of Christ in whom alone is unity, God will hear the voice of His Son resounding through the broken ranks of Christendom, and by ways beyond our present power to discern will restore its visible unity."

If the duty of Christians in this respect is to be fulfilled, the intercession offered must be no mere matter of the devotion of individuals valuable though this will always be ; it must swell and expand until it becomes the " immense unanimous cry of all Christian people." Such a result cannot be obtained unless this universal prayer of Christians, separated here below, but linked through Christ in God, is quickened by a newly-awakened sense of fellowship ; best of all will this be done by what have been called "visible pulsations of prayer recurrent and simultaneous."

One word of caution about the way most quickly discerned for the rousing of this sense of fellowship ; that is to say by the gathering together, official or otherwise, of the members of the various Christian communions in united services of intercession. The holding of interdenominational gatherings for this purpose must needs limit the *universality* of Christian action in the way of prayer of which we are going to speak : for in the eyes of many, indeed of the majority, of Christians ardent for unity, such gatherings are suspect as implying or breeding theological indifference. Nevertheless the way of united action remains open for Christendom as a whole ; a way that God has richly blessed—the way of known and public togetherness in intention

and time, though not in place. What *is* possible for all without any violation of principle is this : that at one season in every year there shall take place a great and manifestly harmonious intercession of all the people of God, a visible and collective act of reparation for the great and public scandal of our divisions. (The manifold obligations of national war-service have made real difficulties with regard to the collectivity of such an act. Many of our readers will be unable to associate themselves with the observance of the week except in intention. But if every reader were to offer privately, and if necessary immediately, the Lord's Prayer *ex animo* for the unity of Christians, they would have contributed much.)

THE OCTAVE OF PRAYER

The annually recurrent, collective, and (so far as may be) simultaneous, act of intercession thus envisaged as the prelude, and almost the condition, of a true change of heart for Christendom in this vital matter, has been already in some measure established by the wide observance of the " Week of Universal Prayer for Christian Unity " from January 18th to 25th. This owed its inception to certain Anglicans, who in England and America inaugurated its observance as far back as 1909. In their case this prayer had as its explicit intention the corporate reunion of separated bodies with the Roman communion on the basis of full dogmatic agreement. Hence the possibilities of this movement towards united prayer were for some time obstructed in England by the impression that those who took part in it were required to agree on certain propositions as to the necessary basis of unity. It was our Roman brethren on the Continent, notably the Abbé Couturier of Lyons, who released the movement from this requirement and urged the observance of the Octave without reference to points of controversy and in entire freedom as to the manner of keeping it. His prophetic appeal to Christians of every denomination has been based on the fact that there is given in the Gospel, in the supplication uttered by our Lord Himself, a bond wholly authoritative and adequate for the unification of the prayer of all Christians without sacrifice of principle. Each Christian communion to whom this appeal to share in the Universal Prayer has come, has been in some measure responsive to its challenge. The week has been observed in France, Germany, Rumania, Sweden, Norway, Greece, Poland, Latvia, Manchuria, and in many other parts of the world as well as in the countries of its origin : by Romans, Orthodox, Lutherans, Calvinists, French Protestants, Syrian Christians and members of other communions represented at Lausanne.

The summons to prayer for unity centred simply on the intention of Christ has received especially wide, understanding and generous-spirited welcome from Roman Catholics abroad. We are told that four popes and two hundred bishops of this communion have blessed the practice. And behind its diffusion among Roman Catholics has been the immeasurable power of contemplative communities—in particular we might instance the Monks of Unity, formerly of Auray, now located at Chevetogne in Belgium. But apart from this hidden support, the week has been publicly observed in Roman Churches in France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Hungary, Ireland and the United States of America. Eastern Orthodox and Protestant Church leaders have not lagged behind their Catholic brethren in their zeal for the propagation of its observance. Those of the Reformed Churches in France and of the Lutheran Church in Sweden have, in the past, been specially warm in their championship of the movement. The latest letters from the Abbé Couturier and his friends give the impression not only that the week of unity in 1941 evoked in many countries an increased support ; but that their own work of stimulating interest and prayer for unity has greatly increased in intensity, while being much less impeded externally than might have been expected in view of France's war conditions.

THE ABBÉ COUTURIER

I have been asked to say something about the one who is commonly recognised as the soul of the new life of this movement, the Abbé Couturier of Lyons, whom I am proud to regard as my friend. The Abbé, who paid us an unforgettable visit here in 1938, was my host at Lyons when I went there to deliver our Superior's contribution to a quadruple message on Christian Unity broadcast by Protestant, Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Anglican speakers. There are things about the Abbé that must be left unsaid while he lives though they are known to all who know him. Some things can be said at once. He embodies the purest and richest tradition of the French Catholic

priesthood : but remains an unbeneficed priest—schoolmaster in a Lyons grammar school. Intensely Gaulois but without a grain of Gallicanism, he has a military drive and precision and tenacity which one used to associate with the French character : likewise its combination of logical penetration and lucidity with a poetic warmth and sublimity of address. He is a living proof that Christian prayer is the antithesis of pietism. To go about Lyons with one so generally beloved was an unforgettable experience, reminding one of going through Walsall with Prebendary McCreery of whom I heard someone say " *That* was what converted England." I have seldom heard anyone speak of the Abbé who did not use some metaphor related to fire. One felt oneself that he was not merely aflame, but flame itself; identical certainly with that which " distributed " itself into tongues at Pentecost[1]; a flame as unitive, as ardent, as gentle, as luminous, as practical, as pervasive and as antiseptic. Intransigently *Roman* Catholic, his catholicity is generous in its perception and sympathy, most swift to appraise the hidden ore in the detached rocks of Christendom. The present pope's first encyclical was drenched in almost similar eirenic magnanimity, which rings out too in Cardinal Hinsley's addresses and in the pages of the Dominican periodical *Blackfriars*, but which was till lately hardly characteristic of Roman Catholic England. But the Abbé's rarest gift is an ingrained compunction for the sins of Christians—sins in particular of pride and lovelessness, not least a compunction for the sins of his own communion ; of which his awareness is as inexpugnable as his conviction of her infallibility as the Church of God. I wish there were space to print the courageous but dogmatically unimpeachable outline (given in his 1940 brochure) of what he conceives to be the true Catholic attitude towards unity. One is reminded, as one asks oneself in reading it how he imparts to his sentences their flamelike quality, that he is a chronic invalid ; suffering seems to stimulate rather than decrease his power of words. He is an oblate of the Benedictine Monastery of Unity in Belgium of which I spoke. I do not know whether he was more at home here at Mirfield, or with his pupils, or with his Russian friends, or at the Trappist monastery not far from Lyons, where he and other priests would meet to confer with Protestant clergy with a view to reasserting their fellowship in Christ and of overcoming prejudice and misunderstanding.

In the company of such men and their circles one grows to realise how, compared to the dynamic faith which in our age actuates the believing minority, the faith of the so-called " ages of faith " was but as a grain of mustard seed compared to a full grown tree. The advance of scientific materialism and of mechanised civilisation, has no doubt lowered, or even in places laid low, the general level of belief where its sand-based flimsiness permitted ; but it has given wings to the faith of Christ's disciples who with each fresh discovery of science and advance of material progress gain thereby (half-consciously perhaps) a larger vision of the unimaginable power of God and of the likewise unplumbed power that is ours through prayer as His fellow-workers. After enjoying such company and viewing its impact on every type and variety of Christian, one grows to know that Christianity is stronger than nationalism ; and henceforward could more easily imagine the sense of religio-racial unity evaporating from the Jews than Christians losing their ingrained, though often repressed, sense of, and craving for, that unity which is theirs as children of the Israel of God.

[1] See R. V. Margin on Acts II, 3.

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